



**Department  
of Health &  
Social Care**

From **NR**  
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Dr Sam Barrell  
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By email to: [sam.barrell@crick.ac.uk](mailto:sam.barrell@crick.ac.uk)

6 July 2020

Dear Dr Barrell,

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 April to Matt Hancock, co-signed by Sir Peter Ratcliffe and Sir Paul Nurse, about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

I understand your concerns and hope these are now resolved. I trust the information below is helpful nonetheless.

Testing is a key part of the UK's response to COVID-19 and, following the publication of the Government's strategy, capacity has rapidly expanded. Anyone in England who has symptoms of COVID-19, whatever their age, can now be tested for the virus. Further information can be found at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) by searching for 'coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested'.

Employers of frontline workers will be provided with information on how to make an appointment for their staff through their local resilience forum, their associated national department or agency, or directly through the Department of Health and Social Care.

Professor John Newton, the Director of Health Improvement at Public Health England (PHE), was appointed in April to oversee delivery of our testing strategy and to bring together industry, universities, the NHS, PHE and Government to deliver on the ambitious targets and improve testing capacity. Moreover, as part of her unpaid role, Baroness Dido Harding is leading on contact tracing, swab and antibody testing, national surveillance and immunity certification.

The Government wanted to make the process of accessing a test faster and simpler. This is why it set up a new online portal for booking a test, opened 150 regional testing sites across the UK and introduced a home-testing solution, which is now providing tests to thousands of people every day, completely free of charge. Home tests are couriered directly to one of the Government's labs for analysis and results are sent directly to the individual's mobile phone, as well as being added to their NHS patient record.

The Government has already built relationships with commercial partners, including Amazon, Boots, Thermo Fisher Scientific and Randox. It is continuing to build new relationships with national and international businesses in life sciences and other industries to turn their resources to creating and rolling out mass testing at scale. It will

also support anyone across the UK with a scalable scientific idea or innovation to start a business.

The Government needs to be confident of the accuracy of antibody tests before it can roll them out as part of a national testing programme. The risk to the health of individuals and the increased risk of viral transmission from inaccurate test results is high, and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has published criteria the Government needs to follow to be confident of the accuracy of antibody test kits.

Antibody kits have been tested against the MHRA's criteria at Oxford University; this process is being overseen by several of the leading scientists in the field. Evaluation of the tests carried out has shown that, so far, none have reached the standard required. It should be noted that no country in the world has yet rolled out a population-level antibody testing programme. The Government continues to review the tests on the market, from both domestic and international suppliers, and is backing efforts to develop a 'homegrown' test. The UK Rapid Test Consortium, which includes Oxford University, Abingdon Health, BBI Solutions and CIGA Healthcare, has been launched in order to design and develop a new antibody test that will determine whether people have had the virus.

The Government has also been working to better understand where the virus is and how it is progressing in the UK. This is why it has partnered with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to embark on a world-leading study to understand the prevalence of the virus over the course of 12 months. In addition, the Government is partnering with a world-class team of scientists, clinicians and researchers at Imperial College London, alongside colleagues at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust and Ipsos MORI. The findings from the ONS will be published in due course, and the results will be used to inform both the short- and long-term plans to tackle the virus.

By working together, a truly national response has been delivered. On 30 May, the UK-wide target to build testing capacity to 200,000 tests a day was reached. The rapid expansion of testing capabilities has led to the largest network of diagnostic testing facilities in British history.

I hope this reply is helpful, and I would be grateful if you could share it with your co-signatories.

Kind regards,

**Personal Data**

**NR**